

seminar. In that seminar, we were introduced to the theories and practices of teaching writing at Miami, using a standard syllabus heavily influenced by social construction theories of composition. During the graduate seminar, we were told by our instructor that we were not to teach style. According to the instructor, the teaching of style ran counter to the goals of first-year composition at Miami. We were told that style was more product-oriented, an individual-based pedagogy that was not compatible with the social-based critical pedagogy the seminar advocated. But I'm stubborn and didn't listen. I still wanted to teach style and suspected at the time that it *could* be a tool of critical pedagogy. The work of Rubin and Berthoff provided me with a theory and practice to do it.

During my second year in the doctoral program, I put some of these theories to practice. The first-year composition course I taught asked students to analyze cultural texts, critique institutional discourse, analyze arguments, and other goals often associated with critical pedagogy at Miami. On the advice of a colleague from a different institution, I also asked my students to buy Joseph Williams' little book *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*. In his book, Williams defines style as "how we choose to arrange our words to the best effect" (4). Williams also suggests that style bridges the gap between the individual and the social in two very distinct senses: one, getting students to write more 'clearly' will make them more effective communicators and thus their inner lives will be less alienated from the public arena; two, playing with the different possibilities of language opens up students to various ways they interact with the public, as well as professional work settings. I found Williams' definitions of style compatible with Rubin and Berthoff's theories of composition, as well as easier for first-year students to understand. Rubin and Berthoff's theories of composing and Williams' definitions became more relevant later that semester as Miami was shaken by campus protest.

That October, the Center for Black Culture and Learning on campus was broken into and papered with racist and homophobic flyers and pamphlets. For two days, both black and white students protested the university's perceived failure to react quickly enough in a way that addressed the fears that many minorities at Miami face. In our composition classroom, conversation revolved around the event, the editorials and articles in the campus paper, and the statements made by Miami University's president. As my class and I discussed and wrote about these events, we found ourselves analyzing the word choice, the sentence structure, and style of these texts. Here, Williams' ideas about style and effective communication became more clear to my students. He argues that many writers often hide their intentions behind language:

Some writers use complicated language not only to dress up their thinking, but to mask its absence, hoping that opacity will impress those who confuse difficulty with substance. Others use intimidating language to protect what they have from those who want a piece of it – the power and privilege that go with the ruling class. We conceal ideas by locking them up, but we can also hide them behind a style so impenetrable that only those trained to read and endure it can find them (7-8).

A number of my students used Williams' idea about language and thinking as a method for critically reading the style of one of President Garland's letters to the Miami community following the protests. Garland's letter attempted to assuage student and faculty concerns over the break-in by explaining his and Miami's support of multiculturalism in higher education, while at the same time it dismissed the efforts of many of the campus protestors as being too reactionary. My students examined the types of words Garland used, copied them down, imitated his sentence structure, translated his words into their own vernacular, and unpacked a language that revealed more clearly his attempt to smooth over the situation with as little conflict

as possible. Some of these students wrote papers that analyzed the president's rhetorical position as one that attempted to redirect the audience's focus from blaming the administration to blaming the protestors themselves for stirring up trouble. By focusing on Garland's "style," my students and I began to regard the teaching of style as complimentary to the goals of critical pedagogy, something for writers to use as a tool to investigate critically their own writing practices and the practices of others.

Although it would be impossible to draw general conclusions from one class, what I describe here is just one experience, not necessarily a pattern. But, this one experience does suggest possibilities for the re-imagining of style as an effective part of critical pedagogy.

To conclude, I want to leave you with a quote from another prominent advocate of critical pedagogy – bell hooks. In her book *Teaching to Transgress* hooks, like Freire before her, also recognizes the importance of beautiful writing and the importance for students to recognize stylistic variety as a means of achieving critical consciousness. She writes:

Using the vernacular means that translation into standard English may be needed if one wishes to reach a more inclusive audience. In the classroom setting, I encourage students to use their first language and translate it so they do not feel that seeking higher education will necessarily estrange them from that language and culture they know most intimately. . . . This call for the acknowledgment and celebration of diverse voices, and consequently of diverse language and speech, necessarily disrupts the primacy of standard English (172-173).

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Signature: <i>Thomas Pace</i>	Printed Name/Position/Title: <i>Mr. Thomas B. Pace</i>
Organization/Address: <i>Miami University (Ohio) 356 Bachelor Hall Oxford, OH 45056</i>	Telephone: <i>(513) 261-0401</i> Fax: <i>N/A</i>
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